

The Monday After by **UnintendedTrustfall**

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Summary:

Steve goes back to school the Monday after the Gate closed. He doesn't go totally unnoticed.

Probably a short, shitty little one-shot unless somebody gives me an idea to add more.

The Monday After

Monday morning rolls around way too soon; Steve's weekend had been a blur and not in the normal, fun kinda way. He remembers defending the kids against the demo... whatever... he remembers getting his ass kicked by Billy Fuckface... then it's a little fuzzy until he's lighting the tunnel on fire. And reflecting now he thinks he probably shouldn't have driven all the kids back to their houses but he did. And then he drove home and his parents weren't back yet, like he expected. And he threw up and stumbled around his house for two days, thinking maybe he should go to the hospital, or at the very least stay with somebody to make sure he didn't slip into a coma.

But then he thought a coma might not be too bad.

To be fair, no one except the kids knew about how bad he'd been beaten, and they had come over to check on him and he had told them he was fine and they could go back to playing Dungeons and Dorks or whatever.

So when Monday rolled around and he didn't feel too nauseous, just his head still ached and he was a little tired, he went to school. Not like he was super dedicated to high school-- he'd missed early application so his only hope was a basketball scholarship or a really good admissions essay to get into college now-- but he was honestly just lonely.

He did his hair and wore the plainest outfit he had because he didn't want anything to draw attention to him and his destroyed face. The swelling had gone down but his face was still splotched purple and yellowy where Billy had punched his lights out. His lip was still split but it has become a scabbed over seam rather than a fat, shiny bloody mess, so that was an improvement. And while comparably to how it had looked when he'd woken up the day after the Gate he looked much better, he realized pulling into the school parking lot that he still looked like absolute shit.

Yeah, his hair was done to its usual perfection and his t-shirt and jacket and khakis all looked normal, his face still looked god awful. A pale, tired eyed, bruised face was not going to go unnoticed, and

Steve was beginning to regret going to school as soon as some juniors crossing in front of him startled when they caught sight of him. Sure, he didn't give a shit what they thought but once he saw the people he normally did, the whispers and taunts were going to start.

But it was too late now, he was already here and he'd be damned if he missed anymore class because he needed to goddamn graduate.

He climbed out of his car, and slung his bag over his shoulder, sipping his coffee as though this were any other Monday at Hawkins High. And as he crossed the lot toward the school and the gasps and whispers started, he smiled to himself, because they'd never know that Billy Hargrove wasn't the worst thing he'd fought this weekend.

At his locker, it was a different story though. These were the people he regularly saw. And the whispering started. And it was embarrassing and awkward and Steve hoped to god he wouldn't see anybody who'd say something like Tommy or Carol or Jonathan or--

"Steve?!"

Or Nancy.

He stiffened a little and turned slightly to see her rushing towards him from across the hall. He sighed, hating to see her worry like this, especially when she wasn't with him so this shouldn't be her concern, even though he wished it was.

And she was examining his face with horrified eyes and her fingers were gentle as they skimmed across his cuts and bruises, ascertaining the extent of the damage. Steve shrugged it away, taking her hands in his, he looked her dead in the face, and he lied,

"Nancy, I'm okay."

But she looked so sad and helpless and almost guilty, and he hates when she looks like that. He hates it because he knows now-- even though she can't seem to believe it-- that she's done nothing wrong.

Finally she says, and it hurts to hear her sound so small,

"What happened to you?"

"It's nothing--"

"Steve, it's not nothing!! Was it the...?"

She trailed off, but she stared at him with fear in her eye of something more rabid than Billy Hargrove.

He sighed and took her hand, pulling her off into an empty classroom, away from all the traffic and the stares. He closed the door gently and turned to her and said,

"No. It wasn't the Demo... thing. It was uh... it was Billy Hargrove."

Nancy blinked, dumbstruck like that was something she hadn't even considered. Although to be fair, with everything on her mind recently, it probably hadn't.

"What? Why?"

"I-- Does it really matter? Nance? I mean, I think there's more important things to deal with than--"

"It *does* matter, look at you! When did this happen?"

Steve hesitated and sighed.

"Maybe two hours after I left the Byers' house."

Nancy stared, searching for words she blurted out,

"Did you go to the police? Or-Or get Hopper to arrest him! You can't just--"

"NANCY." Steve interrupted, taking her shoulders, trying to get her to understand, "I... The kids were trying to come up with a plan... to save Will, and... and then Max's piece of shit stepbrother pulled up looking for her... and then..." Steve remembers too clearly how the psycho had been gripping Lucas against the cabinet, prepared to beat up a kid. "He was gonna hurt Lucas... and going to the cops would just make it worse for Max so... I just..."

Nancy stared as she pieced this story together in her mind.

"You were defending them."

Steve blinked at her like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Well... yeah. I wasn't gonna let that psycho anywhere near--"

Nancy threw her arms around his neck and he froze, surprised. After a moment he relaxed into it and hugged her back. She was so close to him again and she whispered to him,

"Thank you."

A little confused, Steve held her safe and secure and said finally,

"I told you, I'm one hell of a babysitter."

She half laughed, tears slipping out, and buried her head against his chest.